DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 338 750 UD 028 369

TITLE Atlanta Public Schools Peer Leadership Connection. Principal/Student Survey Results.
INSTITUTION Atlanta Public Schools, GA. Div. of Research, Evaluation, and Data Processing.
PUB DATE Apr 91
NOTE 6p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Achievement; *Administrator Attitudes; Grade 8; *High School Seniors; *Instructional Leadership; Interviews; Junior High School Students; Peer Influence; *Peer Teaching; *Principals; Problem Solving; Program Evaluation; Questionnaires; Secondary Education; Social Adjustment; *Student Attitudes; Surveys; Urban Schools
IDENTIFIERS *Atlanta Public Schools GA

ABSTRACT

At the March 6, 1991 meeting of the Instruction Committee of the Atlanta (Georgia) Board of Education, feedback was requested from principals and students concerning the Peer Leadership Connection program. Interview questions were prepared for the principals of the three schools participating, and a questionnaire was developed for students. Responses were received from all three principals, 12 high school senior peer leaders, and 17 advisees, primarily eighth graders. Principals felt that the Peer Leadership Connection program benefitted the students in their schools and that the objectives had been met, both in strengthening the problem-solving and leadership skills of the seniors and in helping the younger students adjust to school. Peer leaders generally acknowledged benefits to themselves through improved problem-solving and leadership skills, and 11 of the 12 peer leaders considered that they had a positive influence on the new students in their groups. At least 14 of the 17 advisees reported that the Peer Leadership Connection helped their adjustment to high school both socially and academically. Responses of all three groups indicate the desire to continue the program. (SLD)

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ATLANTA PUBLIC SCHOOLS
PEER LEADERSHIP CONNECTION
PRINCIPAL/STUDENT SURVEY RESULTS

APRIL 6, 1991

At the March 6, 1991 Instruction Committee Meeting of the Atlanta Board of Education, feedback from principals and students was requested concerning Peer Leadership Connection. Interview questions for the principals of Archer, Douglass, and West Fulton were prepared and questionnaires were developed for the students at those schools who participate in Peer Leadership Connection. A random sample of four (4) Peer Leaders (seniors) and ten (10) advisees (primarily 8th grade) was selected from each school. Responses were received from all three principals, all 12 of the Peer Leaders, and 17 of the 30 advisees. All student questionnaires not returned were due to absences.

The following is a summary of the responses received. The summary is divided into three sections: responses from the principals, Peer Leaders, and advisees.

Responses from Principals

1. The principals reported that Peer Leadership Connection has benefited the students in their respective schools. They explained that the program has made leaders of the seniors and increased their sense of responsibility. The Peer Leaders have learned to focus their attention on the problems of others rather than themselves. Peer Leaders have helped eighth graders make a smooth transition to high school. Peer Leaders have served in a "big brother/big sister" capacity. It has enabled students to identify themselves as individuals, to work cooperatively as a group and to verbalize their feelings without fear of criticism.

2. Principals reported that the objective of the program for Peer Leaders had been achieved. The problem-solving and leadership skills of selected high school seniors had been strengthen as a result of the program. Peer Leaders have become more involved in sharing experiences with the younger students during Peer Leadership than during any other period. There is a strong comradery among the students. Peer Leaders have become more responsible.

3. The principals also reported that the second major objective of the program was also achieved. New students were assisted in their social and academic adjustment to the school as a result of the program. Peer leaders have helped new students to adjust to high school life. The Peer Leaders have helped the new students within school, but also outside of school. Eighth graders have developed a warm relationship with upperclassmen. This relationship has helped them to make the transition to high school academically, socially, and psychologically. The seniors shared their academic and social experiences as new students with the eighth graders and gave them advice on matters that would help their adjustment.

4. The principals encountered very few problems in implementing the Princeton Peer Leadership Model. There were some problems in being able to schedule some seniors and some new students so they could participate in the program. Schedule changes were successfully accomplished for most students, but one or

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more seniors were unable to participate in the program because schedule conflicts could not be resolved. Two principals also reported that they were unable to serve all the students they would have liked to have served.

5. The principals agreed that if it were possible to expand the program within their schools, they would expand it. At Archer, the principal would establish another team so that all students new to the school could be served. At West Fulton, the principal would include ninth and tenth grade students. At Douglass, the principal would expand the program if he had additional staff for this purpose.

6. In conclusion, the principals recommended that the program be expanded to other Atlanta high schools. One principal qualified his "yes" with a comment that other high schools should begin Peer Leadership Connection if they want it. The program is a viable way of developing leadership in high school. It is a complete model that includes selection criteria, staff training, and techniques for developing problem-solving and leadership skills.

Reponses from Peer Leaders

1. All Peer Leaders reported that being involved in Peer Leadership Connection strengthen their leadership skills. Additional comments included: Peer Leadership has taught me the "do's and don'ts" of being a leader and how to have a positive effect on others. I can now talk to a group comfortably. It has helped me to understand that people are very different. I've learned to be patient with underclassmen. I have learned to listen. I feel a greater sense of myself. I can communicate better with people now. Now I feel that I can cope with my own problems as well as helping younger people with problems.

2. Ten of the twelve respondents reported that being involved in Peer Leadership improved their problem-solving skills. Further explanation included: I know what steps to take to solve a problem. Now I get more positive results when I help solve a problem. I don't panic when things come up. It has helped me to stay out of trouble. I have developed a more democratic way of handling situations. I get involved. Now I don't feel so distressed and depressed anymore because I know there is a way out.

3. Eleven of the twelve Peer Leaders reported that the knowledge and experience gained from Peer Leadership would benefit them after graduation. Some additional comments include: I will already have the skills and qualities of a leader. It will help me in my ability to communicate with people I don't know. In the world ouside of school, there are people who don't care about you, but I can handle that now. It will help me to get along with other people. I feel that some of the issues we discuss in Peer Group will be issues that I will have to face in college and I will be prepared. Later in life, when I have children and they come to me with problems, I think I will be able to help them.

4. Eleven of the twelve Peer Leaders reported they had a positive influence on the new students in their Peer Leadership group. Some additional comments include: I have taught them how to avoid an uncomfortable situation and how to get along and trust one another. I listen to the new students, advise them about what is right and wrong, and I don't get upset when they get out of hand.

Some of the students in my group tell me they want to be like me. The kids trust me enough to come to me when they are in trouble so we can talk. I encourage them to come to school everyday. They show me their respect and admiration through their participation. I've earned their trust and confidence, they know I've been where they are going.

5. Eleven of the twelve respondents reported they would choose to be involved in Peer Leadership again, if they had the opportunity. Some additional comments include: It was fun, and excellent learning experience, and challenging. I enjoy working with younger people and giving them advise. I enjoy helping people solve their problems. It helped me grow in a number of ways. A price can not be put on the knowledge and experience that I've gained.

6. Eleven of the twelve Peer Leaders indicated they would encourage juniors at their school to become Peer Leaders next year. Some additional comments: It is an excellent program. Incoming eighth graders would have someone to look up to or depend on when they need advice. It would help them become a better leader in the school. It is especially good for those, who are interested in helping and working with others to better themselves. The experience would help them grow mentally, socially, and emotionally.

7. When asked what they liked best about Peer Leadership Connection, Peer Leaders responded as follows: I enjoyed the people, the closeness, a special bond and love; working with the peers and peer leaders; Parent's Night, it brought us closer to each other; helping students to try to solve their problems, the friendships I have made; the interaction between peers, our activities, and the process of trying to better our school, community, world, and ourselves. I've liked the closeness between peer leaders and adult sponsors.

8. To conclude, Peer Leaders made the following recommendations to improve Peer Leadership Connection: More and better activities, more activities outside of school, more trips to a new environment, and more interaction with other Peer Leaders in other schools to compare and contrast successes in our groups. I'm not sure peer group should be a class. Try to influence not only eighth and ninth graders, but everyone. I have no recommendations, I feel Peer Leadership Connection is absolutely spectacular!

Responses from Advisees

1. Sixteen of the seventeen advisees reported that Peer Leadership Connection helped in their social adjustment to high school. Some additional comments included: It has helped me get use to being in the high school environment. It has helped me cope with everyday problems at school and home. I have learned to be comfortable when talking to others. It has helped me when I needed someone to talk to when I have a problem. It has helped me to communicate with other high school students. I have become more aware of myself.

2. Fourteen of the seventeen advisees reported that their involvement in Peer Leadership Connection helped them to adjust academically to high school. Some

additional comments included: I learned how to study and what to do when I had academic problems. It helped me overcome my initial nervousness. I was influenced to do my work. It has motivated me to come to school, go to class regularly, and to do my best. My grades are getting better. It has shown me better ways to listen and take notes. Peer Leaders have told us how to handle assignments and have helped us with things we don't understand.

3. Fifteen of the seventeen advisees reported that the knowledge and experience they gained from Peer Leadership Connection would benefit them later on in high school. Some additional comments included: I will be able to feel comfortable talking openly with others. It has helped me gain a better understanding of school and life and what it is all about. It has helped me to improve my self-esteem. It will help me to get along better in situations like those we discuss in Peer Leadership.

4. All seventeen advisees reported that their Peer Leaders were a positive influence. Some additional comments included: Peer Leaders showed positive attitudes toward learning and life. They help us learn how to get along with others and cope with feelings. They set a good example. My Peer Leaders depend on me. They give me good advice. They understand my problems. They have talked with us in detail about any and everything.

5. Thirteen of the seventeen advisees reported they would choose to be involved in Peer Leadership Connection again. Some additional comments included: I had fun, it was rewarding, and learned a lot. I liked talking with people who know what it is like to enter high school and be a teenager.

6. Fourteen of the seventeen advisees reported that they would like to be a Peer Leader when they become seniors. Some additional comments included: I want to help students who have just entered high school. I would like to help younger students. I would like to lead and guide others to the right track.

7. When asked what they liked best about Peer Leadership, advisees responded as follows: I liked the discussion, open talks, and games to help us better understand how to cope with being a teenager. I liked the trips, activities, and special events. I liked being able to talk with someone when I had problems. I've made lots of friends and I am communicating with them. We get to talk about things you may not talk about with parents. They have really showed an interest in us and our well being for the future and that means a lot to me. I liked the privacy, loyalty and friendship best.

8. The advisees made the following recommendations to improve Peer Leadership Connection: I recommend that we go on more field trips. It should be an everyday class that is required of all eighth graders. We need more group activities and larger groups. We argue too much. Let other eight graders participate who would like to become involved. Let us meet twice per week or at least more often. Keep Peer Leadership. Help get us prepared for life when we get out on our own.

Conclusion

The overwhelming majority of the respondents, principals, Peer Leaders, and advisees, reported positive opinions about their experiences with Peer Leadership Connection. Their responses indicate a desire to continue the operation of the program.

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